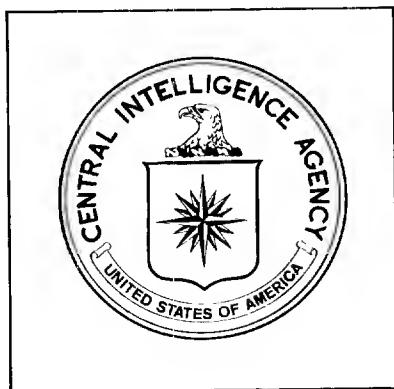


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STAFF NOTES:

Middle East Africa South Asia

Secret 114
No. 0447/75
March 19, 1975

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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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~~SECRET~~South Yemen*National Front Congress May Shed Light on the Ali-Ismail Relationship*

As South Yemen's ruling National Front prepares to open its sixth party congress, President Salim Rubayi Ali has reportedly gained the upper hand over the more radical party secretary-general Abd al-Fattah Ismail. The party congress, already postponed at least once, is scheduled to begin on March 20; there have been continuing reports of disagreement over the agenda, however, and the opening may be set back again.

25X1C [redacted] at a meeting of the National Front's central committee earlier this month, it appeared that an overwhelming majority of the delegates elected to the congress are supporters of President Ali. [redacted] the party's central committee believed the congress would result in an affirmation of Ali's program of "moderation and meaningful ties with the other Arab states."

25X1C

2 Nevertheless, several days later the South Yemeni foreign minister--an ally of Ali--made a trip to the gulf states, where he argued that Ismail and his radical colleagues would sweep the congress unless Ali was able to deliver on his promises of diplomatic relations and economic assistance from the gulf Arabs. There have been a large number of reports during the past several months suggesting that President Ali has promised the Egyptians and Saudis that he would act to lessen Aden's dependence on Moscow, reduce the influence of South Yemeni radicals in domestic affairs, and end meddling in the affairs of North Yemen and other neighbors, in exchange for Egyptian and Saudi political and financial support.

25X6

3 [redacted] This skepticism has generally been shared by the North Yemenis who believe that Ali has adopted a conciliatory

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stance merely as a tactical measure to obtain much needed financial assistance.

The party congress should provide some firm evidence of the status of the Ali-Ismail relationship, as well as Ali's plans. If Ali does intend to moderate the extreme Marxist coloration of South Yemen's domestic policies and seek closer relations with a number of Arab states, the first signs of such policy changes could appear during the congress ^{25X1A}
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India

Prime Minister Strikes Back

Prime Minister Gandhi appears to be regaining some of the initiative she lost last fall when J. P. Narayan's highly publicized, non-partisan protest movement took hold. Mrs. Gandhi has recently taken some decisive steps to tighten discipline within the Congress Party, where friction over how to deal with the highly respected Narayan was threatening party unity. She also appears to be blunting Narayan's appeal by keeping open the possibility of compromise on some of his political demands, such as electoral changes and a new government in Bihar state.

Mrs. Gandhi's recent ouster of two outspoken government officials has discouraged Congress Party members from openly criticizing her reluctance to cooperate with Narayan. The replacement of Maharashtra State chief minister V. R. Naik after he criticized Mrs. Gandhi's leadership strengthens her influence in the most important part of western India where Narayan's movement has not yet secured much public support. This month she also fired the central minister of housing, a vigorous anti-communist and supporter of Narayan.

Mrs. Gandhi reportedly has agreed to remove before long the controversial chief minister of Bihar, the state where Narayan's protest movement began a year ago. She refuses to meet Narayan's demand for dissolution of the entire state legislature, however, and Narayan is likely to continue demanding new elections in the state.

For the moment, Mrs. Gandhi's maneuvering appears to be undercutting Narayan's attack on her administration, and her political position still looks secure. Given the likelihood of new revelations of government corruption and electoral fraud, however, her prestige is likely to continue to decline. (CONFIDENTIAL)

Approved For Release 2001/07/30 : CIA-RDP79T00865A000600070002-8
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